DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 823 CS 507 063

AUTHOR Murphy, John
TITLE Narrative and Social Actions: "The Making of the President 1960."
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Authors; Cultural Context; *Discourse Analysis; Persuasive Discourse; Political Science; *Presidential Campaigns (United States); *Rhetorical Criticism; Social Action; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Frye (Northrop); Kennedy (John F); *Narrative Theory; Political Communication; Political History; Quest; Twentieth Century History; *White (Theodore H)

ABSTRACT

Theodore H. White's "The Making of the President 1960" is widely acknowledged to be a classic of contemporary political history. Using the concepts of Northrop Frye, a study examined the narrative structure of White's work and contends that the book's power derives from its form as a quest story in a high mimetic mode. As such, the book functions to legitimate the political system and the results of the election. Analysis shows that the study of narrative in human communication can profit from an examination of the social action performed by specific types of narratives. Such a perspective would answer charges that narrative theory is too general to provide the pragmatic tools needed for effective criticism. (Thirty-seven references are attached.) (Author/SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315823

Narrative and Social Actions: The Making of the President 1960

by

John Murphy
Division of Communication
Bradley University
Peoria, Illinois 61625

Presented at the 1989 Convention
of the Speech Communication Association
San Francisco, California

CS507063

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John Murphy
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Theodore H. White's The Making of the President 1960 is widely acknowledged to be a classic of contemporary political history. Using the concepts of Northrop Frye, this essay examines the narrative structure of White's work and contends that its power derives from its form as a quest story in a high mimetic mode. As such, the book functions to legitimate the political system and the results of the election. This case study, then, is used to argue that the study of narrative in human communication can profit from an examination of the social action performed by specific types of narratives. Such a perspective would answer charges that narrative theory is too general at this point to provide the pragmatic tools needed to do good criticism.

Key Words

Narrative Theory

Northrop Frye

Theodore H. White

Social Action

Presidential Campaign History

Walter Fisher

Literary Forms and History

When he died, one of his many former employers, Time magazine, wrote that he had "permanently changed the way Americans look at political campaigns and thereby changed American politics as well" (Thomas 62). Few would deny that Theodore H. White affected the American political system more than any other writer of the modern age. He pioneered a new style of campaign coverage and ushered in the era of the "inside story" (Adler 64). That epoch began with his Pulitzer prize winning history The Making of the President 1960.

Even a cursory examination of the bestseller reveals that White disdained the role of "objective journalist." Instead, he saw himself as "The Storyteller" (In Search of History 13). Theodore H. White changed political coverage by recasting the traditionally dull reporting of backroom deals and boring speeches into a "wide screen thriller with full-blooded heroes and white-knuckle suspense on every page" (Crouse 33). The study of such narratives has recently become a central concern to a variety of disciplines. More specifically, a number of critics in speech communication, led by Walter Fisher, have begun to explore the rhetorical implications of narrative. Theodore White's work on the 1960 campaign offers an excellent opportunity to examine the role of narrative in the writing of contemporary political history. By analyzing the narrative style of White's book, I hope to understand its rhetorical and narrative power, illuminate the function of the book as a legitimation of the political system, and suggest a new direction for the study of

narrative in human communication. I shall argue that White chose to frame the election of 1960 as a "national epic" and extolled the virtues of American democracy and John F. Kennedy.

The overarching purpose of this analysis, however, is to demonstrate the utility of examining specific kinds of narrative and their functions in American society. By concentrating on the social actions performed by various types of narratives, critics can better explain the symbolic power of such stories. Toward that goal, this essay will first draw on Northrop Frye's work to discuss the form of White's story; second, it will examine White's tale in some detail; and, finally, it will explore the consequences of White's choices, drawing conclusions about the value of a functional analysis of narrative.

Literary Forms and the Writing of History

The idea that historians make rhetorical choices as they write their accounts is certainly not a new one (Carpenter "America's Opinion Leader Historians On Behalf Of Success"; Fisher "The Narrative Paradigm and the Interpretation and Assessment of Historical Texts"). Philosopher of history Hayden White has, perhaps, but the most emphasis on this aspect of historical writing. White has argued in several places that the key choice made by a historian is one of "emplotment" (Metahistory 7). White argues convincingly that the same "objective" events have been construed in dissimilar ways by different historians. The discrepancies result from the choice of plot. That choice influences not only the narrative itself

but also the meaning that can be drawn from the work (Tropics of Discourse 58-64). White maintains: "Historians, no less than poets, can be said to gain an "explanatory affect"--over and above whatever formal explanations they may offer of specific historical events--by building into their narratives patterns of meaning similar to those more explicitly provided by the literary art of the cultures to which they belong" (Tropics of Discourse 58).

Hayden White draws on the work of Northrop Frye to understand the kinds of stories that historians use and such a choice makes considerable sense in spite of the criticism Frye has drawn from a myriad of literary critics. As White argues, historians do not seek to write the kinds of complex literature that defy the categorization characteristic of Frye's schema (Metahistory 8). Instead, they seek the most conventional of story forms in order to communicate with their intended audience. White contends that a historical interpretation appeals to its readers "as a plausible representation of the world by virtue of its implicit appeal to those pre-generic plot structures or archetypal story forms that define the modalities of a given culture's literary endowment" (Tropics of Discourse 58). Frye himself has recognized the power of literary forms in non-literary works, forms that can capture "the rhythm of history" and explain the meaning of a "crucial event or phase of action" (Anatomy of Criticism 327).

Certainly, Theodore White saw his purpose in similar terms. He later wrote of The Making of President 1960: "It would be written as a novel is written...the story of a man in trouble, of the leader under the pressures of circumstances" (In Search of History 588). To White, his story had to have a central theme and, of course, the fundamental concern of politics "has always been the quality of leadership under the pressure of great forces" (The Making of the President 1960 vii). By choosing to explore the nature of leadership within the story of a quest to seize power, White joined a long line of authors of "thematic epics" (Anatomy of Criticism 58).

Frye maintains that two fundamental divisions exist in literature. In the fictional aspect, the plot is the fundamental concern. The reader is most concerned with the question: "How is the story going to turn out?" (Anatomy of Criticism 53). On the other hand, a thematic work discusses the "idea of poetic thought...that the reader gets from the writer" (Anatomy of Criticism 52). Obviously, no effort is entirely concerned with just one aspect, but works tend to emphasize one of these concerns over another. White, with his focus on leadership, clearly operated within the thematic aspect of literature. Moreover, he drew on a long tradition of storytelling, the recitation of a "national epic" in the "high mimetic mode" of literature (Frye Anatomy of Criticism 58).

High mimetic stories are closely related to romances, with the primary differences involving the attributes of the hero

and the type of setting. While romances often involve nearly superhuman heroes and fanciful settings, the high mimetic story generally involves national heroes and patriotic themes. The story-line itself is usually a quest, with the hero seeking the means to save the society from decline or destruction. These stories center around "the court or capital city" (Frye Anatomy of Criticism 58). Frye argues that the author of such tales often sees himself or herself as a "courtier, a counsellor, a preacher, a public orator or a master of decorum...As a rule, the high mimetic poet tends to think of his function in relation to social or divine leadership, the theme of leadership being at the center of his normal fictional mode" (Anatomy of Criticism 58).

I shall argue, then, that White wrote a national epic in the high mimetic mode. He sought to understand the ways that the "quest" for power "made" a candidate into a President. The book itself follows the general structure of a quest story. White details the sorry state of the land, the early battles in the primaries, the final confrontation with the opponent, and the exaltation of the hero, John F. Kennedy (Frye Anatomy of Criticism 183). While the inside story was a thriller, White made clear throughout that he wanted to consider the idea of presidential leadership. How is it developed and displayed throughout the campaign? What kind of hero and heroic actions are appropriate for the office of the Presidency? The book explored those important issues and the ways in which it answered those questions demands analysis.

Simply classifying White's work, however, is not an end in and of itself. By discovering the specific type of narrative used, a critic can more easily explore the function of the story. Lucaites and Condit have argued that the primary question in narrative studies should be one of function.[1] How does the narration function as a pragmatic, rhetorical act in the culture? I shall argue that, by writing in the way that he did, White created a narrative that legitimated the American political system and the results of the election. A quest story in the high mimetic mode nearly always exalts the leader of the society and the kind of leadership he or she provides. By telling this tale, White assured the American people that they chose correctly and that the system works. As any number of critics have noted, narratives take the incoherence of discrete events and emplots them into a comprehensible and understandable story.

That process is a rhetorical one (Fisher "The Narrative Paradigm and the Interpretation and Assessment of Historical Texts"). Theodore H. White argues through his narrative. He presents views on leadership, on the election, on Kennedy and Nixon, and on the American system. By understanding the type of story White told, and its function, we can better explain its rhetorical power and the symbolic action that The Making of the President 1960 performed for its enormous audience.

The Making of John Kennedy

White believed that he could address his readers and interest them in a political book by focusing on the interaction

between circumstances and candidates. He claimed, "That was where the story lay" (in Search of History 588). Thus, his book addressed not only the decisions of Kennedy, Nixon, and the rest, but also the problems and trends in the nation and in the world. In doing so, he adhered to the format of a quest story. This analysis will concentrate on three key aspects of any quest story and the shape they took in White's book: the sterility of the land before the quest began, the character of the major antagonists in the tale, and the object or "Holy Grail" sought by the hero. More than any other parts of the narrative, these factors created the meaning of the election for White. Taken together, they presented a view of the election as a turning point in American history, a time when the people chose a hero who had the ability to make critical decisions and be the activist President needed to overcome the considerable perils that threatened the country.

Northrop Frye maintains that the primary form of the quest story "is the dragon-killing theme exemplified in the stories of St. George and Perseus" (Anatomy of Criticism 189). The land in these stories is often ruled by a helpless, old king who is unable to overcome the threat posed by some sort of monster. The imagery used to depict the monster in many of these stories, however, suggests that the dragon is merely a metaphor for "the sterility of the land itself, and that the sterility of the land is present in the age and impotence of the king" (Anatomy of Criticism 189). Especially when a quest form is used in the high

mimetic mode, then, concerns of leadership become paramount. The failure of the king to address vigorously the problems of the land leads to decline and decay.

Theodore H. White took the perspective that America suffered from just such a malaise in 1960. His analysis of the condition of the country occurred in two places in the book, once in a discussion of the foreign policy reversals that occurred before the Democratic Convention and once in a separate chapter detailing the results of the 1960 census. The latter served as a framework for the former. The broad trends of the census that promised trouble were beginning to become evident in the growing, specific difficulties the United States had to face. In this way, with the power of non-partisan, "scientific" data from the census, White demonstrated the sterility of the land.

The chapter began with an explicit comparison between the historic 1890 census and the 1960 census. To a nation schooled in the history of Frederick Jackson Turner, such an analogy significantly raised the import of the data to follow. White argued that the 1960 census announced the passing of the great city and the countryside just as the 1890 census declared the end of the frontier. The suburbs were now the center of American life and White maintained that Americans faced an entirely new set of problems as a result of the change. Moreover, he contended that the census also revealed a changed America. More Americans were white collar workers than ever before. Equally important were the alterations in the racial and ethnic

composition of the country. The Negro migration from the rural South to the urban North, the growth in various ethnic groups and in their political power, and the friction that resulted from these changes, were, for White, the key factors in the election of 1960. Any presidential candidate would have to face up to these trends and find ways to cope with this new America (The Making of the President 1960 255-291).

The candidates would also have to face a changing world. White noted that, in the two months prior to the Democratic convention, the country was threatened with a series of foreign policy challenges, stemming primarily from the downing of Gary Power's U-2 flight (The Making of the President 1960 138-141). White used a strategy of enumeration in these few pages, briefly listing each of the problems and their implications. The list was arranged in a climax construction which ended with the threat of the collapse of the United Nations and an end to the world order (The Making of the President 141).

Both in the long term and in the short term, then, America faced difficult and powerful obstacles, threats that could overwhelm the country, as they, according to White, had overcome the sitting President. Throughout these sections, White adhered, for the most part, to the then-popular view of Eisenhower as a genial, ineffective leader. White noted that the agenda for the proposed Eisenhower-Kruschchev summit was exactly the same as the first post-war summit in 1949, clearly implying that Eisenhower had done little. Moreover, White specifically claimed that "our

spokesmen were exposed as false" in the U-2 affair (The Making of the President 117). While he gave credit to Eisenhower the politician (partially as a way to demonstrate Nixon's misuse of that resource), he gave little credence to the idea of Ike as a leader.

The sterility of the land and its leaders calls for the emergence of a hero to battle these demons. Thankfully, John Kennedy happened to be running for President in 1960. As White's wife told him before he began the project: "It's probably a good book if Kennedy wins. But if Nixon wins, it's a dog" (In Search of History 588). In terms of characters, a quest story in the high mimetic mode bears a resemblance to a romance. The hero embodies the finest qualities of the nation and the abilities to overcome the obstacles facing the country and the completion of the quest. The villain is a pretender to the throne. He stands in the way of the hero and does not possess the character the country needs. Frye claims that "everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and the enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero" (Anatomy of Criticism 195). White shaped a view of these two men that corresponds well to this good-evil dialectic. According to White, John Kennedy and Richard Nixon were very different men.

When planning the writing of his first campaign book, White recognized the importance of Richard Nixon to his story. He realized that all of the candidates were "colorful, virile, exciting men, but Nixon was critical to the story--White had cast

Nixon as the villain, as in a novel" (In Search of History 589). Certainly, the fact that Nixon lost the election made White's task easier. He attributed a number of distinctly unpleasant qualities to Nixon, characteristics that virtually eliminated the Vice-President as presidential candidate.

White began his portrait of Nixon as he discussed the early manueverings within the Republican Party before the primaries. Nixon, White wrote in his first extended treatment of him in the book, was a "brooding, moody man" who viewed the world with a "wary, forbidding suspicion" (The Making of the President 1960 76). Moreover, Nixon reflected his California roots in the way "in which the apparently firm and resolute man suddenly changes course and takes new directions" (The Making of the President 1960 78). From the very first, White shaped a view of Nixon as a solitary man, one unwilling to take good advice and, perhaps, incapable of making the correct decisions on his own--certainly not a man worthy of the Presidency.

While White gave Nixon some credit for his handling of the Republican National Convention, the picture he painted of Nixon began to resemble the portrait of Dorian Gray by the time White turned to the general election. The majority of White's discussion of Nixon appears in Chapter 12, "Nixon for President: Round Three."

White admitted his confusion over Nixon, but eventually "decided that, rather than being the hard, cruel, and vengeful man as constantly described in the liberal press, Nixon was above

all a friend-seeker, almost pathetic in his eagerness to be liked" (The Making of the President 1960 299-300). White gave the audience two choices here: Nixon was either a "cruel" man or a "pathetic" one. Neither quality appears in any list of characteristics most desired in a President.

As the chapter proceeded, White continued to flesh out this portrayal. Nixon, in his inability to decide whether he wanted the votes of northern blacks or southern whites, failed to respond at all to the jailing of Martin Luther King, Jr. (The Making of the President 1960 378). Nixon failed to decide how to use the enormous popularity of Dwight Eisenhower and thus lost an important campaign resource (The Making of the President 1960 369-372). Despite health problems, Nixon refused to abandon his foolish pledge to campaign in all fifty states (The Making of the President 1960 297). He failed to prepare carefully for the first debate (The Making of the President 1960 264-65). Most important, Nixon continued to embody terribly negative personal qualities. For instance, White noted that Nixon planned to come out swinging in the last part of the campaign. Instead, White argued, "Mr. Nixon was on the defensive...his gloves-off round was not really a strategic offensive, but rather the snarling response of a frightened man backed into a corner" (The Making of the President 1960 303).

Clearly, the portrayal of Nixon offered by the book argued strongly for the conclusion that the American people made the correct choice in 1960. Richard M. Nixon, according to Theodore

H. White, was in no way qualified to assume the office of the Presidency. He was a pathetic, frightened man, who made bad decisions, and who was carried, when he allowed it, by his President and by his advisors. White finished Nixon off by quoting a member of the Republican Planning Board: "Maybe Dick was never cut out to be top banana from the very beginning" (The Making of the President 1960 380).

Given the dialectical opposition of the hero and the villain in quest stories, one would expect John F. Kennedy to emerge as a great man and White did not disappoint his readers. The opening chapter of the book took place at Hyannis Port the night of the election. The major characteristics of Kennedy were revealed in this vignette and they varied little throughout the book. White built the character of Kennedy around three major traits: He was compassionate, competent, and visionary. These three qualities also happened to be necessary for a President and, by portraying Kennedy in this way, White again reaffirmed the ability of the American public and the political system to select the proper candidate.

Frye argues that the hero should represent the country's values and John F. Kennedy consistently displayed the deeply-held value of compassion. The opening chapter of the book showed a John Kennedy able to think of his family during the stress of a close election.

White's account of the West Virginia primary most clearly revealed Kennedy's compassion. Noting that Kennedy had never

been exposed to poverty, White detailed the candidate's shock at the poverty he saw in West Virginia and his dismay for "kids who never drink milk." White concluded, "Kennedy's exposure to the misery of the mining fields probably changed him most as a man, and as he gave tongue to his indignation, one could sense him winning friends" (The Making of the President 1960 106). White presented the classic image of a man changed by a moving experience; the making of a president. Just like another aristocratic candidate from the northeast, this Democratic contender cared about the poor and unfortunate in American life.

While Kennedy had this human side, he also possessed the competence and the toughness to get the job done. One rhetorical critic has written that a presidential campaign is a "dry run" for the Presidency (Gronbeck 268-280). If a candidate cannot run a campaign, how can he or she run the country? This is the counterpart of Frye's concept of the perilous journey. Heroes must earn their spurs, as it were, in the course of the quest (Anatomy of Criticism 187). Theodore H. White consistently extolled Kennedy's political ability. He described the manner in which the Kennedy machine "purred across the country" (The Making of the President 1960 324). JFK responded with compassion and intelligence to the imprisonment of Martin Luther King, Jr., by calling Coretta King (The Making of the President 1960 384-87). Kennedy correctly recognized that the big industrial states would carry the election and concentrated on winning those electoral

votes in contrast to Nixon's trip to Alaska on the eve of the election (The Making of the President 1960 385-85).

Near the end of the book, White gave a long encomium to Kennedy's family history as an Irish politician, to his intelligence, to his growth during the campaign and concluded that Kennedy was well-prepared for the office of the Presidency (The Making of the Presidency 1960 366-67).

Finally, Kennedy possessed the vision required of a hero. In contrast to Nixon, Kennedy, White argued, had a clear, coherent view of the Presidency and knew what he wanted to do with the office. To some extent, White merely quoted segments of Kennedy's speeches on the "New Frontier" to buttress his argument on this point. He also, however, explained in some detail Kennedy's concept of the Presidency itself and maintained that, like the great Presidents of this century, Kennedy knew the enjoyment of power, the zest that came with running the country (The Making of the President 1960 438-60). Most important, Kennedy demanded action, and, to White, that seemed to be the preeminent quality to be desired in a President.

In fact, not just the Presidency, but a particular perspective on that office, served as the object for this quest. In White's mind, presidential leadership did not mean waiting for the action to come to you as Dwight Eisenhower had done. Rather, White embraced an activist view on the office that had evolved in academic circles in the late 1950's and used Franklin Roosevelt as the ideal President. Specifically citing scholars such as

Clinton Rissiter and Richard Neustadt, White argued that the "expression of his initiative" causes a President to be remembered or forgotten (The Making of the President 1960 369). The last chapter used the strategy of metonmy, presenting his view of the Presidency around the concrete vision of the telephone in the Oval Office.

That phone, White concluded, represented the vast power of the President: "At the other end of the White House telephone system lies not only life and death, reprieve or pardon, of individuals--but life and death of the human race" (The Making of the President 1960 369). Thus, when White talked about "the making of a president," he meant that the stress of the campaign would mold a man that could assume these written and unwritten powers and relieve the sterility of the land.

White's narrative, then, shaped a view of this election as a national epic. The country faced difficult and enormous problems at the outset of the campaign. The current Administration had failed to deal with those problems and its representative in the race, Richard Nixon, was patently unqualified to become President. John F. Kennedy rose in the primaries, passing his tough early tests, and won the election. Kennedy embodied the qualities of a great President, a genuine American hero who could turn the country around. Thus, White performed the traditional role of a high mimetic poet. He constructed a tale that revealed the fine leadership qualities of the leader of the society and, incidentally, probably revealed the best in the people as well.

In the process, he created a thriller--a slam-bang story with the ending that all readers would want. As Time magazine wrote in the midst of the dreary 1988 race, "White's descriptions of the 1960 race are bardic, Homeric...It was then a Ptolemaic universe, revolving around the White House. What higher story to tell?" (Morrow 24).

Conclusions

The reaction to White's "Odyssey" was overwhelmingly positive. He won a Pulitzer Prize for the book, sold millions of copies, and influenced political reporting for a generation. James MacGregor Burns summed up the impact of the work in the New York Times Book Review: "No book that I know of has caught the heartbeat of a campaign as strikingly as Theodore White had done in The Making of the President 1960 (Burns 1). The competition noticed as well. By 1964, the New York Times commissioned a similar book and, by 1968, seventeen campaign books competed for White's market (Crouse 36). The Associated Press told its people in 1964: "When Teddy White's book comes out, there shouldn't be a single story in that book that we haven't reported ourselves" (Crouse 36). According to Crouse, everyone began to adopt "White's magic formula: present politics in novelistic terms, as the struggle of great personalities, with generous helpings of colorful detail to sugar the political analysis" (36).

As indicated throughout this paper, however, that formula has serious implications. Rather than "merely reporting" the election, White chose to tell a story, a tale of the triumph of

the American political system and of a particular kind of presidential leadership. White's conclusions and the power of his narrative in advancing those arguments offer insight into both the study of the rhetoric of the Presidency and into the role of narrative in human communication.

Theodore H. White's theory of presidential leadership should strike a familiar code to most students of the Presidency. White did indeed endorse the activist role for the President advanced by a number of scholars in the late Fifties and by John Kennedy himself during the 1960 presidential campaign (The Making of the President 440; Kennedy; "The Role of the President"). Rather than making that argument in traditional, scholarly terms, however, White placed it within the context of a quest story. The power of the form to create a hero able to leap tall Congresses with a single bound reinforced the notion that a President should have vast freedom to act as he chooses. Within the world of a high mimetic quest story, it seems natural to grant the hero such powers because we know that this man will not abuse them. The narrative form used by White militates against the subtleties of character development that would offer some warning against the "Imperial Presidency."

This exalted view of the Presidency has run into considerable criticism in the post-Vietnam era. Garry Wills, for instance, has identified this attitude as the "Enjoy! Enjoy!" theory of the Presidency (Wills 182-94). Wills points out that Kennedy not only defeated Adlai Stevenson, but also reversed the

traditional philosophy of an older American liberalism "which feared power and trusted the people--the liberalism for which Adlai Stevenson spoke when he asked that the 'cup' of power pass him by. Friends of Kennedy laughed at the mere idea of his asking to be spared the cup" (Wills 183-84). By making Kennedy the hero of his narrative, and by adopting Kennedy's views on the Presidency, White clearly endorsed this perspective. His choice had serious social consequences.

By grounding his argument in a narrative form, White made a "presidential superman" an attractive concept. Americans expect the heros of such stories to have enormous powers. Theodore H. White's "novel" could not encompass a hero who would create Vietnams and Watergates. In actuality, however, the range of powers White wanted to give a President allowed just such abuses to occur.

Those ramifications also extend to the role the book, and perhaps subsequent works like it, play in American culture. As I have indicated earlier, a high mimetic quest story in literature functions to legitimate the style of leadership pursued by the king to whom the courtier is paying homage (Frye Anatomy of Criticism 58-9). This analysis suggests that campaign books play the same role in American politics. They assure the public that the system works, that the candidate who won made all of the right moves, that he was the inevitable result of historic trends, and that he had the appropriate view of America's place in the world. John Kennedy in White's view, played the game of

politics with consummate skill. He represented the growing majority of immigrant Americans and outsiders in the culture who had gradually been building political power. Finally, he understood the role of the President and was willing to use the office to achieve important goals. Even a brief examination of subsequent campaign books suggests that they function in the same way, the most stunning example of which was White's complete rehabilitation of Richard Nixon in the 1968 and 1972 books. While the disillusionment of the times is reflected in the works of later authors such as Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, they still tend to come to the conclusion that America's democracy works well to select the proper leader at a critical time.[2]

In this way, these books function to create what Northrop Frye has called a "myth of concern" (Frye, The Critical Path 36-7). Frye argues that a myth of concern "exists to hold a society together, so far as words can help to do this" (36). The stories that form a myth of concern involve the society's response to authority and how the people work to create a community. Frye maintains that the "influence of social concern on literature is to make it intensely traditional, repeating the legends and learning which have most to do with that concern, and which are as a rule well-known to the poet's audience" (37). The Making of the President 1960 function in just such a way. Drawing on the literary form most suited for examinations of leadership style, the book reinforced the power and authority of the American system. It assured the people, both through the content of the

story, a good deal of which was already known to the audience, and the traditional form of the quest, which the audience well understood from many stories in the culture, that all was well. Given that this book clearly served as the touchstone for much political campaign reporting (Reston 3) and, certainly, created the market and the style used by subsequent campaign books, it seems plausible to conclude that these books function to legitimate both the political system and the style of leadership adopted by the winner.

The ways in which campaign books reinforce the authority of the American political system indicates that narrative can work to undergird, rather than undermine, the status quo. By contrasting narrative reason with technical reason, Walter Fisher suggests that narrative has an inherently democratic or leveling influence (Human Communication as Narration 21).

Fisher's argument is, I believe, more subtle than his critics have been willing to allow (Rowland "Mode of Discourse of Paradigm" 271-73). He maintains simply that people have a greater capacity for understanding stories than they do for grasping technical reasoning, not necessarily that one style inherently embodies more liberal, humanistic values. His use, and endorsement, of Jonathan Schell's The Fate of the Earth, however, strategy used to combat the reasoning of experts. That may well be true in some cases, but the symbolic power of narrative, like all rhetorical strategies, functions equally well in the hands of authorities. As my analysis, and the work of

William Lewis on Ronald Reagan, indicates, narrative can reinforce the power of the status quo (Lewis, "Telling America's Story"). The very fact that people can understand stories so easily means that they can work well to uphold even the most undesirable of leaders.

Clearly, then, various types of narratives serve entirely different functions. A majority of the work done recently on narrative from a rhetorical perspective concentrates on a large, theoretical framework, or what Fisher has called "Narration 1" (Fisher "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm" 55). While some work has been done on specific uses of narrative, even this criticism has tended to explore issues that concern narration 1 such as the concepts of fidelity of rationality (Lewis "Telling America's Story"; Rowland "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies"). This analysis of the functions of campaign books in American culture suggests an alternative direction for narrative research.

Similar to the perspective that Carolyn Miller offers on generic studies, I believe that narrative criticism would benefit from a focus on the "social action" performed by specific kinds of narrative ("Genre as Social Action" 151-55). Such a view in no way conflicts with the exploration of narrative as a paradigm for human communication advanced by Fisher. It may, however, answer some questions about the practical problems of doing narrative criticism raised by Rowland and others. In broad terms, they argue that narrative study to this point has been to

unfocused and fails to provide the critic with the pragmatic tools need "in describing or evaluating a particular work" (Rowland "Mode of Discourse or Paradigm" 265). By concentrating on the social actions performed by a particular kind of narrative, critics can begin the important task of elucidating the roles of narratives in rhetorical practice.

In the case of The Making of the President 1960, for instance, the formal properties of high mimetic stories guided by analysis of White's narrative. At the same time, the functions that Frye identifies for such stories allows for examination of the social action performed by White and his audience.[3] In the post-election period, people naturally feel some anxiety about a new leader. Books such as White's work to alleviate those fears by showing the skill of the leader in difficult situations. The familiar form of the book, drawn from the literary endowment of the culture, makes the story accessible to the audience. Miller has argued that genre should be viewed not only in terms of form of substance, but by "the action it is used to accomplish" (151). Rhetoric is, above all, a pragmatic art used for social purposes.

Narrative is interesting to rhetorical critics not merely for its form or style, but because it is used for persuasive ends within a culture. By seeking to "explicate the knowledge that practice creates" students of narrative can better understand its functions (Miller 155).

Fisher himself has pointed out that his book "does not explore the ways in which a rhetorical critic thinks or writes

(Fisher "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm" 56). That task, however, is precisely what needs to be done. As Lucaites and Condit have pointed out, different narratives function in dissimilar ways (103). By concentrating on rhetorical practice, or what Fisher might call "Narration 2," the true rhetorical uses of narratives can become apparent. In fact, it seems clear that many of the issues that currently bedevil narrative theory, such as the relationship of rational argument to narrative reason, or the explanatory range of the narrative paradigm, could be more clearly examined through consistent study of actual narratives. As David Zarefsky has urged, "we should ground our theories in the data and not lose sight of the cases" (27). If the narrative perspective has value, it must prove that worth in critical practice.

Author's Notes

1. While I strongly agree with the position that narratives should be viewed from a functional perspective, I have some serious concerns about the strict separation that Lucaites and Condit create between poetic and rhetorical works. As my analysis will reveal, I strongly believe that traditionally poetic forms may also serve rhetorical functions. See, for instance, Northrop Frye, The Critical Path.

2. Even the ironic pose of Hunter Thompson's 1973 book Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72 suggests that there was a specific form with a clear function for Thompson to satirize.

3. I do not want to suggest that literature or, perhaps the work of Frye, offers the only tools for explication of narratives. In this case, his ideas provided an excellent means for examination of my text. I have no doubt there exist many other paths in narrative criticism.

References

Adler, Jerry. "The Man Behind the Scenes." Newsweek 26 May 1986: 64.

Bass, Jeff D. "The Appeal To Efficiency As Narrative Closure: Lyndon John And The Dominican Crisis, 1965." The Southern Speech Communication Journal 50 (1985): 103-120.

Bennett, Lance W., and Murray Edelman. "Toward A New Political Narrative." Journal of Communication 35 (1985): 156-171.

Burns, James MacGregor. "The Prize: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue." New York Times Book Review 9 July 1961: 1.

Carpenter, Ronald L. "America's Opinion Leader Historians On Behalf of Success." Quarterly Journal of Speech 69 (1983): 111-126.

Crouse, Timothy. The Boys on the Bus. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973.

Fisher, Walter R. "Clarifying the Narrative Paradigm." Quarterly Journal of Speech 56 (1989): 55-58.

Fisher, Walter R. Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987.

Fisher, Walter R. "The Narrative Paradigm And The Interpretation And Assessment of Historical Texts." Journal of the American Forensic Association 25 (1988): 49-53.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Frye, Northrop. The Critical Path. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971.

Germond, Jack and Jules Witcover. Blue Smoke and Mirrors. New York: Viking Press, 1981.

Germond, Jack and Jules Witcover. Wake Us When It's Over: Presidential Politics of 1984. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

Gronbeck, Bruce. "The Functions of Presidential Campaigning." Communication Monographs 46 (1977): 268-280.

Kennedy, John F. "The Role of the President." Representative American Speeches 1959-1960. Ed. Lester Thonssen. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1960.

Lewis, William F. "Telling America's Story: Narrative From and the Reagan Presidency." Quarterly Journal of Speech 73 (1987): 280-302.

Lucaites, J. L. and Celeste Condit. "Re-constructing Narrative Theory: A Functional Perspective." Journal of Communication 35 (1985): 90-108.

McGee, Michael C., and John S. Nelson. "Narrative Reason in Public Argument." Journal of Communication 35 (1985): 139-155.

Miller, Carolyn. "Genre As Social Action." Quarterly Journal of Speech 70 (1984): 151-167.

Reston, James. Introduction. The Making of the President 1960. By Theodore H. White. New York: Atheneum, 1988.

Rowland, Robert C. "Narrative: Mode of Discourse or Paradigm?" Communication Monographs 54 (1987): 264-275.

Rowland, Robert C. "On Limiting the Narrative Paradigm: Three Case Studies." Communication Monographs 56 (1989): 39-54.

Thomas, Evan. "A Reporter in Search of History." Time 26 May 1986: 62.

Thompson, Hunter S. Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72. New York: Quick Fox, 1973.

Warnick, Barbara. "The Narrative Paradigm: Another Story." Quarterly Journal of Speech 73 (1987): 172-182.

White, Hayden. The Content of the Form. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

White, Hayden. Metahistory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

White, Hayden. Tropics of Discourse. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 19.

White, Theodore H. America In Search Of Itself. New York: Warner Books, 1982.

White, Theodore H. In Search of History. New York: Warner Books, 1978.

White, Theodore H. The Making of the President 1960. New York: Pocket Books, 1961.

White, Theodore H. The Making of the President 1968. New York: Atheneium Publishers, 1969.

White, Theodore H. The Making of the President 1972. New York: Atheneium Publishers, 1973.

Wills, Garry. The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation On Power. New York: Pocket Books, 1982.

Witcover, Jules. Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency 1972-1976. New York: Viking Press, 1977.

Yoder, Edwin M. "Plutarch on a Campaign Bus." U.S. News and World Report 26 May 1986: 14.

Zarefsky, David. "The State of the Art in Public Address Scholarship." Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric. Ed. Michael C. Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld. Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1989.